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The Smoky Valley

By

Birger Sandzen

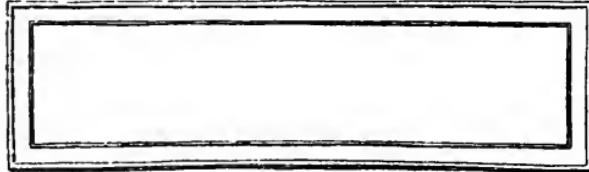
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The Smoky Valley



Birger Sandzen

THE SMOKY VALLEY

Reproductions of a Series of Lithographs of the Smoky Valley
in Kansas

By
Birger Sandzen

An Introduction by Minna K. Powell



CARL J. SMALLEY
Kansas City, Missouri
1922

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Sandzen and His Friend, the Smoky.

When Birger Sandzen looks into the seamed face of a pioneer farmer of Kansas, he sees the conquest of a spirit. When he looks upon the face of the Kansas prairie, he sees the conquest of the wilderness and he makes the world feel the courage of the Kansas spirit and the power of Kansas sinews.

An artist who penetrates below the surface of his subject and sees the soul of it looking out, Birger Sandzen was foreordained to celebrate in black and white and in color, the moods and the meaning of the Smoky Hill River, which winds so peacefully in and out among the farms of central Kansas.

The Smoky Hill River is not much wider than a creek, and the early homesteader valued it chiefly because it watered his land and his stock.

Then came Birger Sandzen, artist, who settled near the stream in the town of Lindsborg. Almost immediately a deep affection sprang up between the artist and the river. Accustomed to a land of many streams and lakes, the artist haunted the banks of the river that seemed to speak to him of home. He served the friendly stream by celebrating its moods and sudden turnings, and the stream taught the artist by gentle gradations its own affinity for the prairie.

It was so that Birger Sandzen learned to love the Kansas landscape. But first he sought the shadowed banks of the Smoky. By sunlight and moonlight he studied it. Following its grace-

ful windings, he caught the poetry of Kansas,--- the tired droop of cattle as they came to drink at dusk, the grouping of horses in hillside pastures, huddled cottonwoods like shy children along the clean banks of the stream.

Finally the river taught him to see the masterpieces of art in the strong and rugged faces of the pioneer farmers whose land stretched along the river's bank.

He saw faces in which courage had drawn with a true hand lines of self-conquest. He saw the beauty of fingers knotted and bent with much serving and the glory of dimmed eyes. The pioneer men and women of Kansas were crowned by Sandzen with the splendor of their deeds.

But always he returned to the quiet river, grateful for the woods that hugged its banks and were mirrored in the water. His passion for the Smoky grew and deepened. It became to him the heart of Kansas, and Kansas, through the Smoky, became his friend.

And always, as he tramped up and down the river's banks, he saw in miniature the grandeur he was later on to find in the Rockies and the mystery he was to sense in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

As he painted outcroppings of rock in the hilly pastures, he was preparing unconsciously for his work of giving expression to the gigantic cliffs and mountains of the great West. Tributaries of the Smoky, overflowing their banks in the spring freshets, ran dry in summer and provided the artist with beds deeply fissured like their titanic model, the Grand Canyon.

The hills near Lindsborg, are small replicas of the Rockies. They slope to the very bank of the Smoky and Birger Sandzen climbed from bank to summit where he looked out over the wide prairie and saw how lovely it was.

Since then he has never tired of painting the landscape that is the heart of Kansas, vibrating with the heroic toil and patience of the past and the hope of the future.

Thus it is that when Mr. Sandzen makes a study of the moon stealing up behind the willows before the flush of afternoon is quite gone, he puts into the picture not only the objects a stranger might see, but also the deep love he bears the river and the land it has enriched.

As a lithographer Mr. Sandzen has no rivals in this country, perhaps none anywhere. His love of the open is that of a poet, to whom the out-of-doors tells something of the immanence of God.

Sometimes his landscapes express the poignant loneliness that broods over the Kansas prairie. Oftener he sees the delightful homeliness of the farmsteads, changing the Smoky River Valley from a wilderness to a place of hearthstones and human happiness.

MINNA K. POWELL.

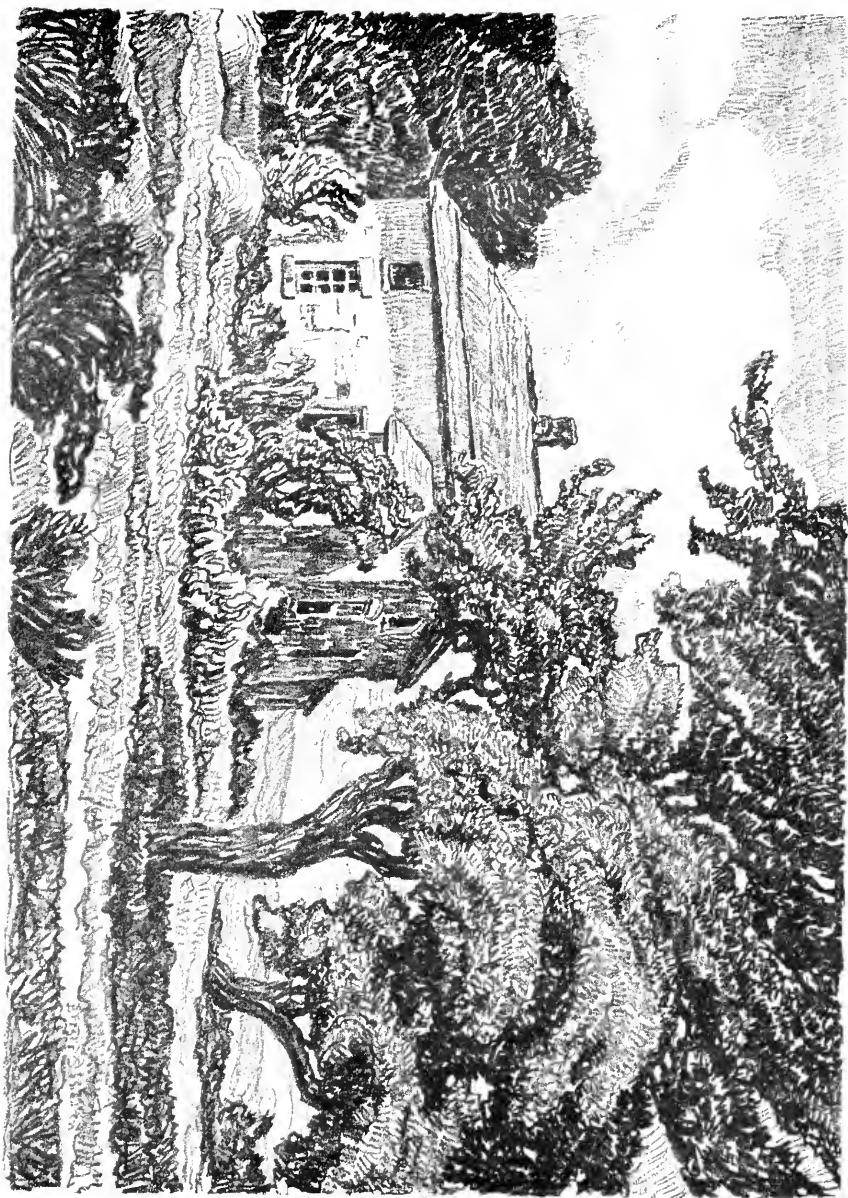
Summer



Stony Pasture With Cottonwood Grove



The Old Homestead



Portrait Study



Twilight



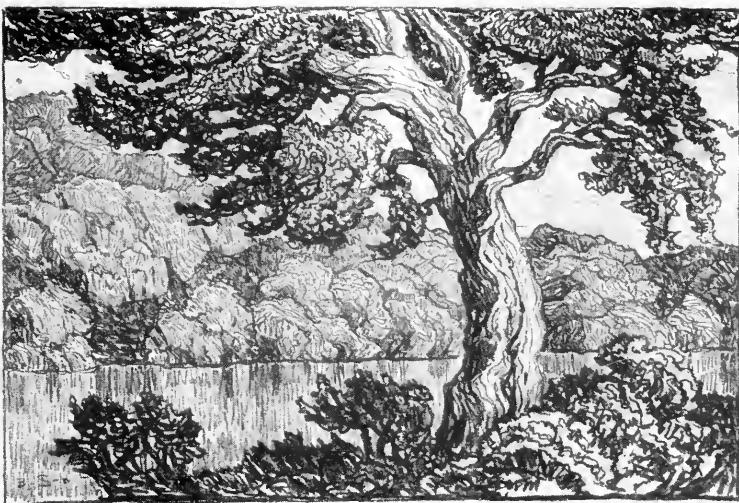
In The Meadow



Home of A Pioneer



Smoky River



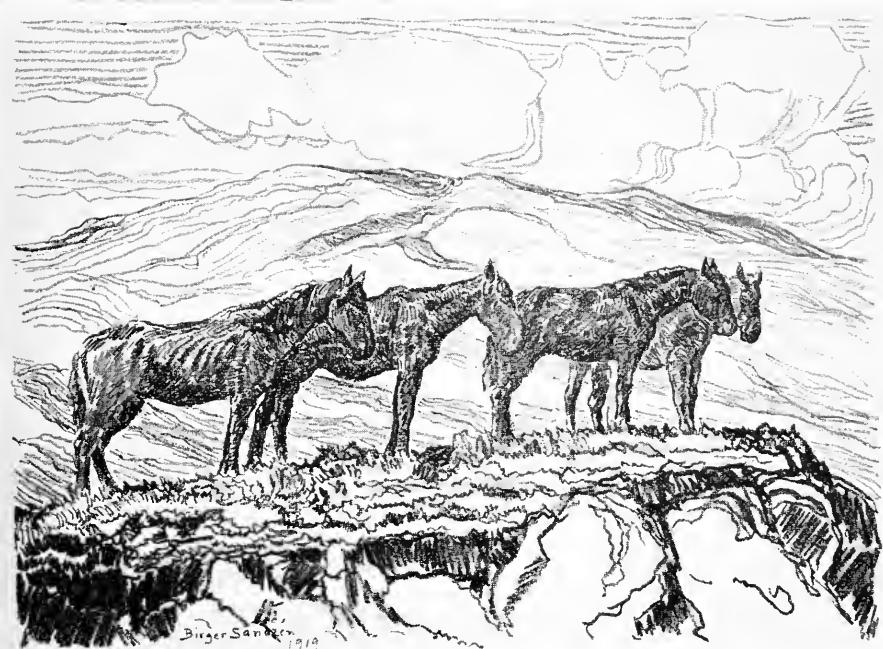
Hilltop



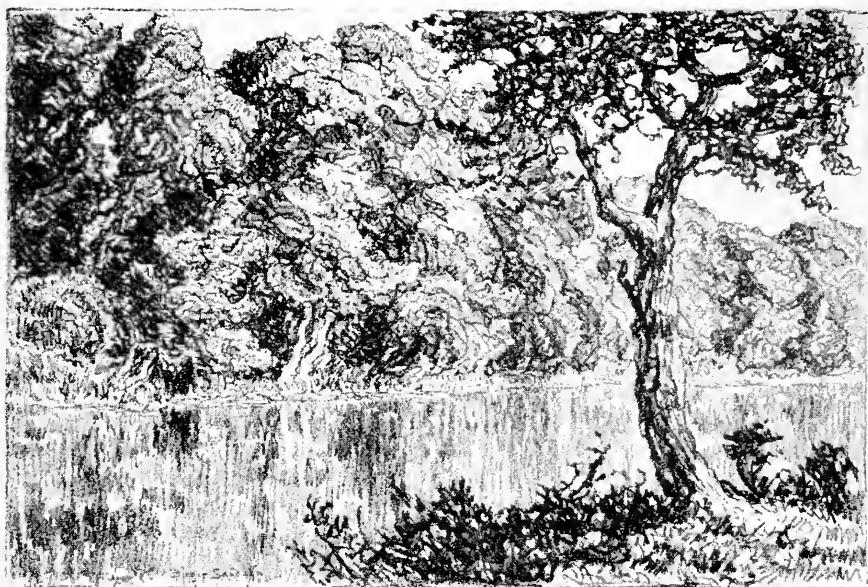
Willow



Horses in a Hilly Pasture



River Motif



Abandoned Farmhouse



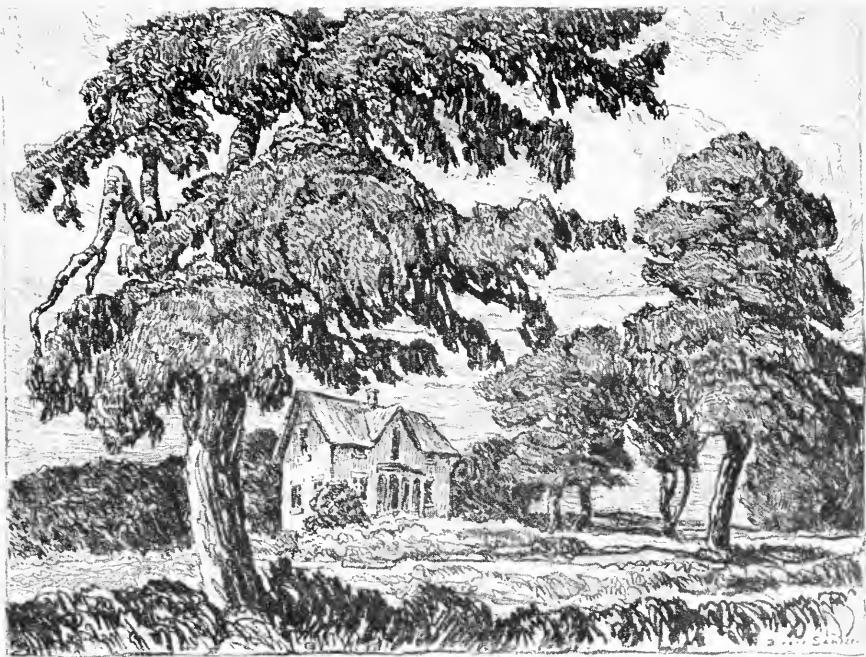
Trees and Hills



Willows by The Smoky River



Olof Olson's Homestead



Pond With Cottonwood Trees



Hilly Pasture With Cows



In The Park



Fig. 3. - *La Porte de la Forêt*

Riverbank



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CARL J. SMALLEY,
Kansas City, Mo.

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